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ABSTRACT

Testing includes all the things teachers do to assess the learning progress of their students and to diagnose their learning difficulties. Most teachers can develop whatever tools they need to assess student progress, but, if teachers are to test rigorously and frequently, they must be given adequate time to evaluate students individually, adequate resources to assess student progress fairly, and the support of specialists to help diagnose particularly complex student learning disabilities. External evaluations are of little help; testing and assessment processes must be an integral part of the curriculum and instructional process. In addition to testing to improve classroom instruction, testing has other legitimate purposes, such as providing information to policy makers, parents, and the news media. (RH)

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PANEL PRESENTATION ON ASSESSMENT

NATIONAL FORUM ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

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Teachers believe students should be tested frequently and rigorously. Most teachers do just that.

They do it by using their own teacher-made tests.

They do it by observing their students.

They do it by talking to their students.

They do it by examining their students' work.

And they do it by other means as well.

Testing, then, includes <u>all those things</u> teachers do to assess the learning progress of their students and to diagnose their learning difficulties.

Testing certainly should include paper-and-pencil instruments. But teachers need <u>much, much</u> more than paper-and-pencil exams to

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make complete and accurate assessments of a student's learning status.

Most teachers can develop whatever tools they need to assess student progress in their own classrooms, if conditions are right. And, in fact, such teacher-developed instruments are usually much more helpful than tests or procedures mandated from the outside by someone not familiar with the teacher's learning objectives.

But if teachers are to test rigorously and frequently, they must be given adequate time, the resources, and the special support they need to do it right.

o Adequate time means teachers must have the opportunity to evaluate students individually. Too much testing is done in assembly-line fashion. Students march into huge auditoriums and are handed No. 2 pencils and a computer-correctable answer sheet. Then a test monitor paces the floor droning instructions.

Students almost never get to see the test results. Teachers do receive them, but it is often months later, when they are of little use.

o Besides time, teachers also need adequate resources to assess student progress fairly. That means they require observation and interview techniques, processes for evaluating student

compositions, and strategies that allow students to simulate real-world activities.

o And finally, teachers need the support of specialists to help diagnose particularly complex student learning disabilities.

In their recently released education reports, Boyer, Goodlad, and Sizer all note that teachers know how to use most of the testing and assessment processes they need to evaluate their students. External evaluations are of little help to them in the hundreds of day-to-day decisions they must make on classroom management and student learning.

In this sense, <u>testing and teaching are inseparable.</u> Testing and assessment processs <u>must be an integral part of the curriculum and instructional process.</u> Otherwise, how can teachers decide how best to adjust the curriculum or their own teaching methods to help their students learn better?

So far I've only talked about testing used to improve classroom instruction. There are other legitimate purposes for testing, such as the need to give information to outside groups:

o POLICY MAKERS such as local school board members, state legislators, state school board members, and others all have their own particular student information needs. Some need to know, for example, about the overall educational strengths and

weaknesses of student populations so they can wisely allocate resources at the local, state, and national levels.

For these groups, tests must measure more than a student's recall of particular facts and figures. And they must cover more than just mathematics and reading.

There's an important point here that I want to emphasize. Policy makers need information on student populations, not individual students. That means testing should be conducted using sampling techniques. Not every student has to be tested in order for policy makers to get the data they need.

And once policy makers have the results of test sampling, they should consult with teachers and other experts in education. Policy based on test results must be carefully drawn, flexible, and lead to the improvement of teaching and learning. It should not be punitive.

o Who else needs information from testing? PARENTS, of course. Parents need to know how well their child is learning and how they can help the teacher help the child learn better. So parents need test results translated into meaningful descriptions of student achievement, effort, and attitude. And don't forget — teachers need time to discuss test results with parents.

o The NEWS MEDIA, especially the press, also need clear, concise, non-technical information on testing to be able to interpret test

scores to the public. I believe the press should be reporting not only the scores on standardized reading and math tests, but also the schools' progress in accomplishing all of the objectives of public education.

Reporters themselves must become more knowledgeable about test scores and what they mean. Or else we're going to see more stories like the one I saw recently in a Florida newspaper. ``Half of college sophomores score below average on test'' the headline said accusingly. And, what's more, the paper reported, that happened ``in every subject.'' Apparently whoever wrote that story and headline didn't know that the use of averages requires that half come out above and half below the norm.

So, to sum up.

o Testing is essential to good teaching and maximum student learning.

o Testing must be an integral part of the curriculum and instruction.

o Teachers need to use many different kinds of assessment techniques. Most of those can be developed in the classroom.

o Test scores should be used mainly to improve learning, not to sort out or segregate students or to deny some students learning opportunities.

o For policy makers, parents, and the media, testing results must be clear and concise and reported in ways that help them.